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AUTHOR Pierce, Doris F.
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ABSTRACT

The increasing number of women today becoming involved in political activities and holding elective office is evidence of the changes in women's roles in politics which began in the 1960s. Role change began with increased political activity in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. In the late 1960s and early 1970s feminist organizations were formed to combat sex discrimination; expand the social, economic, and political role of women; and support favorable legislation. In addition, there was an increase in the number of women voters. There has also been a significant historic change in the rise of the percentage of women delegates to the national conventions. An important vehicle for this rise was the rule changes focusing on ensuring opportunities for full participation which were recommended or required at the 1972 Republican and Democratic conventions. During this period when women have been increasing their role in the national party conventions, other changes in the Presidential candidate selection process at the state and local levels of government have contributed to an increase in party offices held by women. Additional changes in political positions indicate that though more women run for office, few are involved in managing campaigns, or fund raising which is essential for successful election to public office, and that most party organizations are not encouraging any of these steps. Changes in political career ladders include women using the traditional male professions as stepping stones to office or establishing an issue-oriented political network. Involvement in a political party is increasingly necessary for election. (RM)

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CHANGES IN THE POLITICAL ROLE OF WOMEN SINCE 1960

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Doris F. Pierce
Purdue University Calumet
Hammond, Indiana 46323

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on History and Social Studies (12th, Hammond, IN, November, 1981).

CHANGES IN THE POLITICAL ROLE OF WOMEN SINCE 1960

Emphasis will be upon the changes in the woman's role in the political parties, the type of positions held by women and changes in the career ladder for women with political ambitions.

Change of any sort is usually slow and difficult; when the proposals involve sex roles developed in a long socialization process, it would be surprising if a major transformation were made quickly and easily. Likewise any attempt to rearrange power can be expected to encounter great resistance. The time and effort poured into the women's suffrage movement illustrates the point. In the last two decades there has been an enlargement of the political role of women, but there have been few dramatic shifts. Perhaps the most important is that women are making demands for themselves for the first time since the struggle for the right to vote. The current demand for equal rights has drawn women into a great variety of political activities. A larger proportion of women vote, belong to organizations, lobby for and against women's rights, and participate in political parties. More women are running for office and winning, and some are reaching political office by the same route as men, although the proportion of women in political office remains low.

Increased political activity of women began with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's in which many women both black and white were deeply involved. Many white middle-class women and young college students participated in the political system in a way which was novel for them by marching in the demonstrations and other direct action. It seems only natural that women who were working for equality for blacks would question whether they as women had equal rights.

As early as 1961, President Kennedy responded to the emerging issue by appointing a Commission on the Status of Women, which was followed by similar commissions in some states. This was followed in 1963 by the U.S. Citizens' Advisory Council on the Status of Women which linked the various state committees creating a nationwide link of politically active women. The reports of these commissions publicized the extent of discrimination and were a major factor in the prohibition of discrimination contained in Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The high expectations raised by this victory led to disappointment when the first executive director of the Equal Employment Commission, Herman Edelsberg, indicated he did not consider sex provision of the act important. The lack of vigorous enforcement of the act was a topic of discussion at the Third National Conference of Commissions on the Status of Women in 1966. On the last day of the Conference, a small group of women decided a new organization was needed to more vigorously pursue women's rights, and the National Organization for Women (NOW) was born.

Of course, women's organizations were not a new phenomenon as there were a number of well established ones such as the Business and Professional Women, The League of Women Voters, and the American Association of University Women, to name a few. But the organizations formed in the late 1960's and early 1970's were activist feminist groups formed especially to combat sex discrimination and expand the social, economic, and political role of women. In addition to NOW, new groups included The Women's Equity Action League (WEAL) in 1968 and the National Women's Political Caucus (1971). During the same period women on college campuses active in the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) pushed for equal treatment within the organization and in regional workshops urged the liberation of women.

They later provided leaders and members for the new style feminist organizations.

Voting statistics reflect this growing political involvement of women. Although historically a larger proportion of men than women have voted, since 1960 the gap has almost disappeared. This is important for a number of reasons; first, the stereotype that politics is for men has ended. Secondly, since women constitute slightly more than half the adult population, the equal voting record made women a potent political force. Moreover, voting appears to be the entry into the political system; people who do not vote are unlikely to engage in other political activity. Thus, in 1960 the political role of women began to expand in significant ways.

Twelve years later the Equal Rights Amendment passed Congress and was sent to the states for ratification. Many women had to acquire knowledge about the political process and participate in the activist women's organizations and political parties to persuade the Congress to approve the amendment. This is only one result of the increased political involvement of women. Another example was the dramatic leap in the percentage of women delegates to the national conventions from 13 percent in the 1968 Democratic Convention to 40 percent in 1972. The background of this historic change is perhaps even more revealing than the sheer numbers although they are amazing.

The composition of the 1972 Democratic Convention followed rule changes recommended or required by the party's Commission on Delegate Selection and Party Structure, better known as the McGovern Commission. The McGovern Commission was an outgrowth of the 1968 convention, which was a disaster for the Democrats in many ways. The large number of protesters who felt inadequately represented and the heavy handed tactics of the Chicago police

made it clear to many in the party that something was seriously amiss. This concern was considered by the Committee on Rules and Order of Business when it held hearings to determine recommendations for the 1972 convention. Among these was a recommendation to assure equal representation at the 1972 convention. The Credentials Committee report also included a resolution instructing the Democratic National Committee to include in its call for 1972 convention encouragement to state parties to ensure that all Democrats in each state have equal opportunity to participate in delegate selection. The Convention adopted such a resolution.Although the primary intent of this resolution was to prevent racial discrimination, it was to prove an important vehicle for an expanded role for women.

Following the instructions of the convention, Democratic party chairman Senator Fred R. Harris established the Democratic Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection in 1969 and named Senator George McGovern to head it. The Commission by a very narrow 10-9 vote adopted an amendment offered by Senator Birch Bayh urging that the share of delegates bear a reasonable relationship to the proportion in the population of such groups as minorities, women, and youths. There was, however, a disclaimer which said the requirement was a goal to be pursued, and not a quota. This amendment was to have tremendous impact upon the make-up of the 1972 convention. Since our political parties are so decentralized, the McGovern Commission had to submit its reforms to party organizations in the fifty states. A statement by a staff aide that delegates not chosen by the methods suggested by the commission could be subject to challenge before the Credentials Committee alerted those who supported the recommendation to a possible means of enforcement. Opposition was expected from the Southern states and some labor groups since I.W. Abel, president of the

United Steel Workers Union, was appointed to the commission but refused to attend. About thirty states had set up their own reform committees, and their attitude toward the commission was not known.

The struggle over the seating of delegates was intense, and the critical pressure point became the Credentials Committee, chaired by Patricia Roberts Harris. It opened deliberations June 26, 1972, facing 82 challenges to 1,289 delegates from thirty states—about 41 percent of all elected delegates. More than 80 percent of the challenges were on grounds of non-compliance with guidelines regarding adequate representation of women, youth, and minorities.

The rule changes were thus vital to the expanded participation of women in the 1972 convention, but women had to be selected as delegates in state primaries and conventions and in many instances had to challenge other delegations from their state or defend against challenges in order to participate as delegates. The efforts of Mayor Daley and the regular Democrats of Illinois to ignore the McGovern Commission and fight for their position through the courts is a reminder of how vigorously these rule changes were fought.

The Republican party at its 1968 National Convention did not establish specific guidelines to ensure opportunities for full participation. Instead, it adopted a new rule which directed involvement in delegate selection procedures not be restricted for reasons of race, religion, color, or national origin. Sex was conspicuously absent in the phrase. There was, however, a general statement that directed the Republican state committees to take positive action to achieve the broadest possible participation in party affairs. Despite the less forceful Republican requirement, the

proportion of women delegates at the 1972 Republican convention did increase to 30 percent.

It is apparent that many factors contributed to the increase in women delegates to the national conventions. The fact that the Democratic Credentials Committee was chaired by a woman undoubtedly was of great assistance. It also demonstrates that chairing committees or sub-committees is a position of power. But women chairpersons appeared only after a gradual widening of the influence of women in the conventions, which took place over a long period of time. As early as 1932, seventeen women were given committee assignments in the Republican party and increased to fifty-five in 1944, but the reversal of male dominance of committees came in 1964 when the Republican convention adopted a rule mandating each state elect one man and one woman for the major committees, for example, Resolutions, which is the Republican platform committee. Building on this base, by 1972 women chaired more than half the sub-committees of the Resolutions Committee, and Anne Armstrong, co-chairperson of the Republican National Committee, gave one of two keynote addresses. This set the stage for Mary Louise Smith, who became chairperson of the Republican National Committee and presided at the 1976 convention until a permanent chairperson was selected. Similarly, Jean Westwood became the first woman to hold the position of Democratic National chairperson in 1972. This was the same year Shirley Chisholm campaigned for President. Her effort was not inconsequential since she held 101 delegate votes. She released them only when others were changing votes to give George McGovern the nomination. By 1976 women had an equal share of the limelight in the Democratic convention. For example, Representative Barbara Jordan gave a keynote

speech, former Representative Martha W. Griffiths chaired the Rules Committee, and Representative Corinne C. Boggs chaired the convention.

However, during this period when women have been increasing their role in the national party conventions, other changes have occurred in the process of selecting Presidential candidates. Now slightly more than half of the states have presidential primaries, and the trend is for delegates to vote for the nominee of the primary voters' choice. In contrast, in the period before 1960, few delegates were selected by primaries, leaving opportunity for candidates to bargain for delegates at the convention. Until 1972 caucuses to select delegates were not very open, leaving delegates free to engage in bargaining at the convention also. Now the caucuses are quite open, and again the delegates feel more bound or are strongly committed to a candidate when they arrive at the convention. This does not mean that conventions are meaningless; occasionally there are close contests between Presidential aspirants which are determined at the convention, but its role has been diminished at least for the present.

State delegations have historically been the bargaining units at national conventions with candidates appearing before a state delegation and requesting support. Prior to 1972 the Democrats used the unit rule; therefore, a candidate supported by a majority of the state delegation received all the votes of that state. Abolishing the unit rule in 1972 enlarged the bargaining area to include every individual delegate thus decentralizing the decision-making. This change in rules made it easier to create coalitions of delegates such as coalitions of women or blacks, youths and so forth. Indeed, caucuses of women, blacks, and youths did

emerge, but generally they supported McGovern so the bargaining tended to center around the candidate and/or states, so the traditional pattern of bargaining did not change fundamentally. The behavior of women at the convention tended to be governed mainly by support of a candidate and not their sex per se.

Clearly there was an increase in the participation of women in the parties at the national level, but since our parties are decentralized, it is necessary to see if changes occurred in the states as well. A careful study of Maine's Democratic party done by Louis Maisel[1] provides information about changes there. Although the Maine experience does not provide proof of what happened generally in the states, there is no reason to suspect Maine unique in this regard. In May of 1968, Maine established a committee, the Mitchell Committee, to review the structure of the state party. Later this committee assumed the task assigned by the McGovern Committee. The committee's report concerning increased participation specified the need for efforts directed toward youth but did not mention women. It is not surprising that only a little over one-third of town or ward committees reported taking specific actions aimed at interesting women in attending caucuses. Likewise, as could be expected, those making an effort were more likely to have an increase in women attending. Since there was also an increase of women participants in highly Republican areas, it appears that it was easier for women to participate in Democratic committees which are weak or dormant. Party leaders in office where that office has some potential influence are less interested in encouraging new participants.

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[1]"Party Reform and Political Participation: The Democrats in Maine." Louis Maisel and Paul M. Sacks, ed., The Future of Political Parties, Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1975.

The increase in participation is accompanied by an increase in party offices held by women. There are more women on committees if there are more women in the caucuses. Looking at the number of women serving as officers a pattern emerges; more women served as officers in 1972 than in either 1970 or 1968, although the change is not great. Of the three main positions in the local party, chairperson, secretary, and treasurer, as would be expected, there were fewer women chairpersons than secretaries and treasurers. However, the evidence indicates that fewer women run for office. Women are not competing for their share of power, and most party organizations are not encouraging them to do so.

Although it seems clear that a larger proportion of women are active in political parties and hold party office, there is still considerable typecasting of roles by sex. This study of Maine is consistent with others which show women are less likely to be involved in managing campaigns or in fund raising, two areas of expertise essential for running successfully for political office. Despite this, there has been an increase in the number of women holding elective office. While only 4 percent of all elected offices were held by women in 1975, 12 percent held office in 1980. As would be expected, the largest increase is in municipal and township governments. These are not necessarily small jobs as illustrated by Jane Byrne, Mayor of Chicago, and Dianne Feinstein, Mayor of San Francisco. Likewise women are holding more important state offices such as Governor and Lieutenant Governor.

Of the various avenues to elective office, the one unique to women is appointment to office upon the death of a spouse. Some who are appointed serve the remainder of the term and drop from political view, but others

stay on to develop a political career on their own merit. In many instances, the wife worked with her husband during the campaign and after his election served as an unpaid staff member. These women are political professionals although they may not be recognized as such.

Other women who were elected to office followed a different career ladder. Often they began by working actively in the League of Women Voters or for some issue, probably one affecting women or children, such as education or health care. After years of civic dedication, they are well known in the community and have a network of friends. At a critical juncture they decide that policy changes are the fastest way to accomplish their purpose. From this, it is a reasonable step to run for elected office. The reputation established over a long period, knowledge of the power system, and the large network of supporters may bring success. These women are primarily issue oriented and do not have any general desire for power, per se.

In contrast, men are more likely to run for elective office as a result of long time association with a political party. They are more likely to be motivated by a desire to represent the "people." Although the man may have a definite political philosophy, he is not so likely to have entered politics as a result of dedication to a specific issue. Closely associated with this is the planned movement into elective office as a way to improve his professional standing. The typical example is the young lawyer who runs for a local or state office expecting the name recognition and contacts of the office to launch him into a successful law practice. Besides lawyers, businessmen may see public office as a way to improve their business.

Some women are now moving into elective office by this route that heretofore has been dominated by men. Perhaps the best known, besides

Mayor Byrne, is the late Ella Grasso, the first woman governor to be elected on her own experience and merit. Another example of a woman who followed this path to office is Barbara Jordan, a lawyer who served in the Texas Senate before her election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1972. Although the list is short, it is growing. More important than numbers is the fact that women now see themselves as capable of representing the "people" and capable of exercising power.

No doubt women now have an avenue to elective office that did not exist in the recent past. Women are moving into the professions that men have used as springboards to office, but women in these professions and occupations are not benefiting from them as much as men, due in part to their recent entry. Today approximately 30 percent of the students in law schools are women, and many elected officials are lawyers. As these women become lawyers, it is likely that some of them will run for political office. Likewise officials in higher office often have held other elective positions so the considerable number of women office holders in municipal and state governments may serve as a pool of eligibles for higher office. But there is evidence to suggest that political parties are still reluctant to slate women or give them unofficial support in primary elections although they are much more willing to support women incumbents.

Raising money may be the biggest roadblock to women with political ambition. One study of fifty-five women candidates in 1976 conducted by Rothstein/Buckley, a Washington-based consulting firm, found that business and labor groups were less willing to contribute to women. Today campaigns are so sophisticated and costly that without some support of party leaders, money, research, and targeting assistance, chances of success are slight. Involvement in a political party is increasingly necessary to gain public office.

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WOMEN OFFICEHOLDERS BY YEAR*

	1975	1977	1979	1980
U.S. Congress	19	18	17	17
Statewide Electives	30	24	32	33
State Legislative	610	696	770	766
County	456	656	947	1,144
Mayoralty and Municipal/Township	4,650	9,406	12,459	14,176
TOTAL	5,765	10,800	14,225	16,136

*Public Administration Times, September 15, 1981.

TABLE OF WOMEN DELEGATES TO THE DEMOCRATIC CONVENTIONS—1892-1976*

CONVENTION YEAR	TOTAL DELEGATES	WOMEN DELEGATES	% OF WOMEN DELEGATES
1892	925	0	-
1896	860	0	-
1900	958	1	.10
1904	987	0	-
1908	1,066	2	.18
1912	1,388	2	.14
1916	NA	11	NA
1920	1,330	93	7.00
1924	1,448	199	14.00
1928	1,398	152	11.00
1932	1,634	208	13.00
1936	1,782	252	14.00
1940	1,842	208	11.00
1944	1,537	174	11.00
1948	1,555	197	13.00
1952	1,543	203	13.00
1956	2,477	287	12.00
1960	2,717	303	11.00
1964	2,934	416	14.00
1968	3,049	405	13.00
1972	3,195	1,274	40.00
1976	3,075	1,036	34.00
1980			49.30

*Personal letter from the Democratic National Committee.